The
Ballarat Naturalist

March 2015

February meeting presentation

A most unusual evening for our club. John Gregurke, and Claire and Peter Dalman had prepared presentations on recent trips: John to Cape York and Claire and Peter on SW Queensland. Both had computer slide shows. Unfortunately neither could be made to display on the screen so while attempts were made, Claire described our trip which included Broken Hill, Tibooburra, Cameron Corner, Innamincka, Coongie Lakes, the Dig tree, Thargomindah, Windorah, Qulipie, Bedourie, Birdsville and more. She related anecdotes about the trip including unexpected meetings with Elizabeth and Denis Thurgood, the nature of the areas and personal reflections.

Photo: Amazing what (who) you find in the outback!

She was thanked by Ken Hammond who commented that it was a rare occasion but interesting nevertheless to not have pictures. It was surprising that neither presentation worked. It is hoped that John will be able to give his presentation at another time.

Claire and Peter Dalman

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Western Treatment Plant Excursion Sun 8 Feb 2015

Four cars left Ballarat at the earlier excursion starting time of 8am. Fortunately on the day a cool change had arrived after several days of very hot weather.

First stop was at the T-section ponds where 20 Cape Barren Geese flew in and landed. Large numbers of Australian Shelduck were around the edge of the pond. Further away Pelicans, Yellow-billed and Royal Spoonbill, Grey Teal and Australian Shoveler were viewed through telescopes. Red-necked Avocet and Black-winged Stilt were busily feeding. A shallow pond with muddy edges was the feeding place for many migratory waders including Common Greenshank, Red-necked Stint, Sharp-tailed, Marsh and Curlew Sandpiper. We had a good view of a flock of Zebra Finch feeding along the track.

An interesting variety of birds were seen among a patch of rocks along the coast line. Small Fairy Tern were seen near the larger Crested Tern. Black-tailed Godwit and Pied Oystercatchers were feeding in the mud.

As we traveled along the coast the notable birds included Little Egret, Musk Duck, Pink-eared Duck and Chestnut Teal. When we arrived at the bird hide for lunch, two Australian Spotted Crakes were feeding in a shallow pool with Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. After lunch we viewed Blue-billed Duck in their usual spot along with Great-crested Grebe.

At the borrow pits we saw Red-necked Avocet, Black -winged Stilt and a few Banded Stilt. On closer examination many more Banded Stilt were found hidden among a tight group of Red-necked Avocet; the red legs of the Stilts contrasted with the grey legs of the Avocets.

Another interesting observation was Sharp-tailed Sandpipers feeding amongst the vegetation on a bank at the edge of a pond. We assumed they were feeding on soldier beetles that which we had noticed earlier.

After leaving the treatment plant we stopped near Avalon Airport to look for Banded Lapwing. We found several birds cattle-grazing in the paddock. Including these birds, we saw 65 species for the day.

John Gregurke

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Coming Meetings & Excursions

1. *No excursion on Sun 8 March because of SEANA*
2. ***Because the first Friday of April is Good Friday meeting & excursion will be held on the second Friday and Sunday (see p8).***

SEANA Program

Provisional Program (subject to change as numbers or other circumstances dictate)

Friday 13 March

4.30 pm Registration at Pax Hill. Sign up for excursions.

+Tea and coffee will be available at Pax Hill all weekend.

6.00 pm Dinner

7.30 pm Welcome in Pax Hill dining room: President, FNCB.
Housekeeping notices
Guest Speaker Emily Noble, FNCB: *Local flora and fauna.*
Carol Hall, FNCB: *Water Rats.*
Supper

Saturday 14 March

7.30 - 8.30 am Breakfast for those staying at Pax Hill and those who paid for breakfast/lunch package.

8.45 am Meet at Pax Hill for half and full day excursions.

9.00 am Excursions depart

12.00 pm Morning excursions return to Pax Hill

1.00 pm Afternoon excursions leave from Pax Hill

4.00 pm Excursions return to Pax Hill

4.30 pm SEANA AGM and General meeting

6.00 pm Dinner

7.30 pm Guest Speaker: Martin Scuffins, Hawk Haven Wildllife Shelter: *Birds of Prey – Nursing the Fierce.*

Sunday 15 March

7.30 - 8.30 am Breakfast for those staying at Pax Hill and those who paid for breakfast/lunch package.

8.45 am Meet at Pax Hill for half excursions.

9.00 am Excursions depart

12.30 pm Lunch and farewell at Pax Hill

Helpers required

FNCB is to provide supper e.g. biscuits and slices, for Friday and Saturday nights. Also volunteers are needed to serve, and clean-up after the suppers.

Excerpts from Club Meeting minutes February 6 2015

Opening and Apologies

Attendance: Peter Dalman welcomed 26 members, including birthday boy- Bill Murphy

Apologies: Fran Hanrahan, Peter Noble, Dulcie Brooke, Douglas Menon, Lorraine Powell, Helen Burgess.

Business Arising from Previous Meeting:

Club members voted to donate $100 to Leigh Valley Hawk & Owl Sanctuary establishment. Done.

Correspondence: IN:

From Environment Victoria: confidential survey on what they are doing and how they are doing it; plea to let the new State Govt. know that current brown coal export plans should be scrapped; request to let Energy Australia know that they object to their plans to supply brown coal to Coal Energy Aust. who plan to construct an export terminal in the middle of Corner Inlet, host to an important ecosystem next to Wilson's Prom.

From Trust for Nature: receipt & thank you letter for Club donation towards the purchase of another 160 Ha at Long Swamp; email confirming that the entire amount required has been raised and the purchase will go ahead; Season's Greetings.

From Shared Business Systems: email advising us that the first grant instalment had been deposited into the Club's designated account. Also, from Rosemary Tolhurst: document concerning John La Gerche and forestry history in Creswick.

From Steve Burns, BREAZE: invitation for our Club to nominate whether we would like to use a free stall provided for community groups at the Smart Living Market to promote our Club's upcoming activities or events, benefits of membership or facilities and suggest our preferred date (market is on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month). Need to be set up by 8.30am and manned until 1pm.

From Stephanie Suter, Corangamite CMA Waterwatch Facilitator: Information on the water quality testing resources and information they could provide to our group for one of our field trips.

SEANA Excursions

Details of all excursions will be available when you arrive at Pax Hill to enable you to sign up for the excursions you wish to attend.

Saturday -14 March

Excursion	Leader	
Wombat Forest	Gayle Osborne, Wombat Forestcare Kevin Tolhurst, Uni of Melb, Creswick	All day
Lake Burrumbeet, Winter Swamp and Haddon area	John Gregurke, FNCB	All day
Birds around Creswick	Ken Hammond, FNCB	am
Mt Buninyong	John Mildren, FNCB	am
Urban Ants	Peter Muller, FNCB	am
Lilwarre, Smythesdale	Emily Noble, FNCB	pm
Creswick to Smeaton; Goldfields & Volcanoes	Peter and Claire Dalman, FNCB	pm

Sunday morning -15 March

Excursion (all in the morning)	Leader
Macarthur Park and Paul's Wetland	Roger Thomas, FNCB & Birdlife Ballarat
Lake Wendouree and North Gardens Wetland	John Gregurke, FNCB
Exceptional trees of Ballarat	Fran Hanrahan, FNCB
Ballarat Botanic Gardens	Claire Dalman, FNCB
La Gerche Forest Trail, Creswick	John Petheram, FNCB

What to Bring

Name tag, Thermos flask, water bottle and mug.
Personal record form to carry with you at all times.
Binoculars and magnifying glass. Bird and plant field guides.
Folding chair for excursions, hats, coats sunblock, insect repellent, etc. as you require.

Further information

General Business

SEANA Autumn Camp. About 65 people have registered so far. John Gregurke described planned field trips and asked for volunteers to facilitate tours. Almost all positions filled.

Club Camp to Aireys Inlet planned for October 16-18. (*Details probably in April.* Ed.)

Genny Binns reported that the health of long-time Club member Helen Burgess has improved over the last few weeks and she would welcome visitors at the Jim Gay Unit at the Queen Elizabeth Centre.

Show and Tell Reports

Carol Hall brought along some stunning photos taken recently at Mt Hotham. Subjects included Gang Gang Cockatoos, damselflies and dragonflies.

John Petheram reported seeing "the biggest snakes he'd ever seen in Victoria" in Creswick Forest in early January. He believes they were more than 2m long Copperheads.

Les Hanrahan spied a Rufous Fantail in Wombat Forest

Wayne McGuire, from atop the Mt Buninyong Fire Tower has seen White-throated Needletails on several occasions over the last month and is a local celebrity now after Win News broadcast the weather from the fire tower with Wayne in shot.

Emily Noble reported observing a very well-camouflaged Latham's Snipe feeding around the wetland at her block in Scarsdale on Christmas Eve, a pair of Sacred Kingfishers and chick regularly feeding above the wetland and the discovery of the 42nd orchid species on the block, *Corunastylis archeri*, the Variable Midge-orchid, now flowering.

Margaret Thomas reported Galahs widening a hole in a Stringybark at Nerrina, perhaps preparing it as a nesting site. There have been honeyeaters, rosellas, thornbills, wrens, fantails and wattlebirds visiting her birdbath and rosellas eating Silver Birch seeds and Crab-apples whilst the wattlebirds have been eating the apricots.

John Mildren saw a wild pig at Wombat Gardens, Daylesford.

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From MairiAnne Mackenzie, Western Highway Environmental Rescue Effort (WHERE): email requesting our Club's involvement in the protest about the environmental damage being caused by the Western Hwy duplication between Beaufort and Buangor.

From Jill Redwood, Environment East Gippsland: Letter advising that a meeting EEG had with the Environment Minister last week discovered that the State Govt. is planning to review the 5% burn target so interested parties need to start putting their arguments and data together urgently.

OUT:. To Steve Burns: nominated May 23rd as our Club's preferred date for stall at Smart Living Market.

Business Arising from Correspondence:

Would anyone like to be involved in advocating for environmental values of the land on which the Western Hwy duplication is being undertaken by VicRoads? Will include receiving & writing emails, & attending a VicRoads drop-in session on Thurs 12th Feb, 3-7pm. No-one volunteered.

Reports:

Treasurer's Report: Opening balance $6,348.14 Income $8,874.41 Expenses $959.75 closing bal: $14,262.80

Other reports:

Victorian Biodiversity Atlas training with Jemma Cripps from DELWP: 7 members attended a very informative and practical day of training in searching the database and submitting data for entry.

John Petheram reported on the La Gerche Trail, asking interested persons to contact him about attending a meeting with Parks Vic staff or being involved in other aspects of the project. Friends of Ballarat Botanic Gardens have been very helpful with our queries about label signs for trees along the Trail, & he has had worthwhile site meetings with Andy Arnold and Kevin & Rosemary Tolhurst.

CALENDAR 2015-16

March

Fri 6	*AGM & Members' Images* - Flowering plants
Sun 8	***NO EXCURSION*** *until SEANA the following weekend*
Fri 13 - Sun 15	**SEANA hosted by Ballarat FNC at Pax Hill**
Tues 24	Committee meeting at John Gregurke's

April

2nd Fri 10	*Wildflowers of WA* Neil Macumber
Sun 12	*Excursion to La Gerche Trail* J Petheran
??	Mid-month excursion TBA

Committee

President	Peter Dalman
Vice –Pres	Fran Hanrahan
Secretary	Emily Noble
Treasurer	Les Hanrahan

Claire Dalman
John Gregurke
Wayne McGuire
Val Hocking
John Mildren

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Meetings are held at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr and Gregory Sts, on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm..
Excursions: Leave from the carpark at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts. at 9.30 am, unless otherwise advised.

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